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ABSTRACT

"The Holocaust" is an exercise designed to measure thinking processes of students in grades 8 through 12. It consists of a 14-minute videotape and a four-page handout describing the destruction of the European Jews. The exercise is based on an approach to measuring thinking suggested by the work of E. A. Peel (1971). Peel maintains that the best means of observing a person's thinking ability is to ask him or her to explain a situation. To select topics for the interpretive exercises, 182 eighth graders were asked to indicate their interest in 31 topics typically covered during a history course. Both the videotape and the handout provide students with information that can be used in developing a relatively complex view of the Holocaust. Students are assessed based upon written responses to five questions that are scored on a cognitive complexity continuum based on a detailed scoring rationale. At the lower end of the continuum are "either/or" responses that provide no supporting facts, while at the upper end are responses that consider various possibilities and relate these to causal conditions. Data on "The Holocaust," plus results of the Checklist of Learning Behaviors, a Task Involvement questionnaire, and a sentence completion task, were collected from 153 eighth graders. Although the data are encouraging, they do not offer strong evidence of the validity of "The Holocaust." The questions, with scoring criteria, are appended. (TJH)

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The Holocaust - A Prototype Exercise to Measuring Thinking

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Abstract

"The Holocaust" is an exercise designed to measure thinking processes of students in grades eight through twelve. It consists of a 14 minute video tape and a four page handout describing destruction of the European Jews. Students write responses to five questions which are scored on a cognitive complexity continuum

Several widely used instruments are available for measuring thinking processes at the high school level and above, notably the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Watson & Glaser, 1980) and the Cornell Test of Critical Thinking (Ennis, Millman, & Tomko, 1985). Both of these instruments are multiple choice tests which are designed to measure a set of mental processes believed to be related to thinking processes, i.e., drawing inferences, making deductions, recognizing assumptions, deciding whether a conclusion is warranted, et cetera. The manuals for both of these instruments offer a number of coefficients showing moderately high correlations between the tests of thinking skills and standardized tests of school achievement and ability. There are no data presented which demonstrate a relationship between these tests and more compelling exercises of thinking processes. Without such data, the claim that these instruments measure thinking processes must be viewed with some reservation. In addition, it may be noted that the person taking the test need not actively

construct any deductions, draw any inferences, or recognize any assumptions. The student taking the test simply indicates whether the thinking processes built into the test items are acceptable or unacceptable. There is no reason to suppose that the student, without prompting, would actually engage in similar thinking processes when confronted with a puzzling situation.

An alternative approach to measuring thinking processes is suggested by the work of Peel (1971). Peel maintains that the best way to observe how well a person thinks is to ask him or her to explain a situation. Typically, Peel would present subjects with a paragraph describing an Andean farmer who cut down the forest and planted a crop which produced a profitable harvest. Other farmers followed his example. Within a short time, the fertile soil was eroded away and the farmers were left trying to till their barren soil. After reading the paragraph, students were asked to "describe and explain" the situation.

Peel scored the student responses on a four point "describer-explainer" scale. Low scores represented simple description and repetition of the information given. High scores used cause and effect relationships to explain what happened and brought in world knowledge which helped make the explanations more complete.

Our efforts to construct tests of thinking processes have followed the Peel approach. We have attempted to build interpretive exercises which are sufficiently compelling to

motivate students to seek explanations, and which are open to several interpretations.

in selecting topics for the interpretive exercises, we asked 182 eighth grade students to indicate their interest in 31 topics typically covered during the spring semester of American history. The top five topics, ranked in order of interest, are shown below.

1. Vietnam
2. Decision to drop the bomb
3. Holocaust
4. world war I
5. Events leading up to World war II

We selected the Holocaust as the topic for an interpretative exercises designed to measure thinking processes.

"The Holocaust" consists of a 14 minute video tape and four pages of reading about the virtual destruction of the European Jews by the Nazi government during World War II. The video tape is a condensed version of the one hour film, Genocide (Simon Wiesenthal Center). The tape presents background information about the conditions in Germany following World War I focusing on the unemployment and loss of self esteem. The need for a scapegoat is linked with Hitler's campaign of hate and harassment of the Jews in Germany. The tape includes scenes of life in the ghettos, killing of Jewish civilians behind the lines, and the transports and atrocities of the concentration camps.

The printed material elaborates some of the major themes introduced in the film and introduces new facets of the situation: close-up views of life in the Lodz Ghetto, the steps taken to deceive the Jews and lull them into a sense of security about the transports and the camps, some of the reasons for not resisting, the fact that some Jews resisted, and the reactions of some German soldiers to their participation in the shooting of civilians.

Both the tape and the written materials provide students with information which can be used in developing a relatively complex view of the Holocaust. If students choose to use the material, they can construct a picture of the Holocaust which includes cause and effect relationships and which goes beyond stereotypical simplifications of the aggressors and the victims.

We have emphasized the matter of choosing to use the information for two reasons. First, Siegel (1988) has consistently maintained that there is a dispositional aspect to thinking, a "critical stance" which is a necessary prerequisite to thinking. Without such a disposition, individuals who are capable of thinking may not use their capabilities. Messick (1984) also draws a distinction between tests of "maximum performance" and tests of "typical performance". Most academic tests fall in the first category and test what a person can do when performance is prompted by the task. Tests of typical performance, on the other hand, provide an indication of what a person chooses

to do when confronted with a situation for which the abilities of interest are appropriate. This distinction is important when contrasting the present interpretative exercise with more conventional approaches to measuring thinking processes.

Following the presentation of the material, students respond to five questions which provide broad opportunities to organize and use the material in their own way:

1. Considering everything you know about the Holocaust, what questions would you like to ask if you had the time and materials to pursue these questions?
2. Could a tragedy like this one happen again? What are the reasons for your answer?
3. Describe the reactions of the Jewish people. Give the reasons they reacted this way.
4. What do you think the individual German soldier might have thought about participating in the killing of the Jews?
5. During World War II, in the United States, there were a large number of citizens with Japanese ancestry. Many of the farmers and neighbors were envious of Japanese prosperity. The United States (which was at war with Japan) put all their Japanese citizens into concentration camps. When this decision was challenged, the Supreme Court declared that it was legal. What comments or observations would you like to make about this situation?

A detailed scoring rationale is used for scoring the responses on a continuum of cognitive complexity. At the lowest end of the scale are responses which state a simple "either-or" position with no supporting facts or details. At the upper levels of the continuum are responses which consider various possibilities and relate these possibilities to causal conditions. The scoring rationale is a critical feature of the exercise and it is presented in its entirety as an appendix.

Data on the Holocaust were collected from 153 eighth grade students enrolled in American History in a Midwest, rural school. Measures of learning autonomy and achievement motivation were also administered to the students. These instruments are described below.

1. Checklist of Learning Behaviors. This is a 15 item check list (McDaniel & Ferreyra, 1989) used by teachers to rate students on behaviors associated with learning autonomy. Teachers mark "rarely," "sometimes," or "frequently" to such items as: Seeks to clarify ideas in the material studied.

2. Task Involvement. This is an 9 item subtest from a larger questionnaire designed to measure achievement motivation (Nicholls, 1989). The items in this subtest measure involvement in school tasks, i.e., "I have a good day in school if I solve a complicated problem." High scores indicate an interest in understanding the material rather than simply working for a grade.

3. When I study history... This is a sentence completion task scored to indicate the level of intellectual engagement with historical content. Responses were scored on a three point scale on which a score of 1 was assigned to responses indicating dislike or boredom, a score of two to responses indicating an interest in the topic or an attempt to remember facts, and a score of 3 to responses indicating intellectual engagement with the ideas of history and an attempt to develop personal meanings from the material.

In addition to these tests, the history grade assigned at the end of the course, the total battery score of the Iowa Achievement Tests were obtained from the school records.

The student responses to "The Holocaust" were scored by two scorers and where difference occurred, the scores were adjudicated. The scores from "The Holocaust" were correlated with the other data obtained from additional testing and the school records. The results are presented below.

Results

The correlation coefficients among all variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Correlations among "The Holocaust" and other variables

	Holocaust	Ach	Grade	Autonomy	Task Inv
Holocaust	---				
Ach	.45	---			
Grade	.44	.67	---		
Autonomy	.35	.39	.60	---	
Task Inv	.26	.15	.26	.25	---
Study Hist	.15	.13	.24	.30	.32

All of the tabled correlation coefficients are significant beyond the .01 level with the following exceptions: the correlations between the Holocaust and Study History (.15) and the Iowa Achievement Test (.15) were only significant at the .05 level. The correlation of .13 between Study History and the Iowa Achievement Test was not significant.

The data in Table 1 indicate moderately high correlations between the Holocaust and both standardized achievement tests and teacher grades. This might be expected and indicates that students who do well on the thinking exercise tend to be better students, but the relationship is far from perfect and suggests that "The Holocaust" may be measuring elements which are not included in the "good student syndrome."

The measures of Autonomy and task involvement reflect activities and motivations associated with thinking processes and, indeed, the correlations of "The Holocaust" with these variables are significant, .35 with Autonomy and .26 with task involvement. The involvement with course material as indicated by the "When I Study History..." question was significantly related to the Holocaust scores, but the correlation (.15) is too small to warrant further attention.

On the whole, the data are encouraging, but they do not offer strong evidence of the validity of "The Holocaust". We feel that the primary value of the Holocaust is as a prototype for additional exercises which can be used in convergent validity studies. As a prototype, the exercise has four advantages over existing tests.

1. The stimulus material is a relatively complex historical situation which can be interpreted in a variety of ways.

2. The presentation of the situation primarily by video tape reduces the need for reading skills and engages the student in an emotionally compelling way to interpret and explain the situation.

3. Responses are constructed by the student with a minimum of prompting and direction.

4. The scoring rationale enlarges on Peel's describer-explainer continuum to include elements of cognitive complexity.

Existing tests of thinking processes typically present fragmented situations and require students to choose among statements. Our approach focuses on the cognitive elaborations the student uses to construct a position or a point of view. Central to this approach are the thinking processes which students bring to bear on problematic situations.

There are a number of unanswered questions about exercises of this type. For example, we are not sure if the printed handouts contribute to the exercise. Since reading abilities vary greatly, the printed material may add a confounding variable. Second, we do not know if the written responses reflect the full potential of students with poor writing skills.

What are the effects of prior background knowledge? Students with a Jewish background may participated in numerous discussions of the Holocaust. Does the emotionally laden content hinders the thinking processes of these and other students viewing the tape?

Finally, the scoring rationale represents a first iteration of scoring rubrics which reflect thinking processes. We intend to continue to work on this aspect of the exercise.

Most of the questions about this interpretative exercise can be answered by empirical research. We believe that the prototype exercise presented here represents a unique and useful approach to the development of measures of

thinking processes.

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Footnotes

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3 Appreciation is expressed to Richard Meister, West Lafayette School Corporation, Jason Brewer, Tippecanoe County School Corporation, William Castore and Richard Hinshaw of the Twin Lakes School Corporation and Ching-Pyng Shiang and Yvonne Ferreyra of Purdue University for their help in developing this exercise.

Appendix

SCORING RATIONALE FOR HOLOCAUST

Question #1

Question: Considering everything you know about the Holocaust, what questions would you like to ask if you had the time and materials to pursue these questions?

Level 0: 0 Points - No response given.

Level 1: 1 Point - Questions posed are generally factual and trivial. Responses would be limited to isolated facts or recall. Example: How many camps were there?

"When the men were taken by train, why didn't they bail out while the train was still going or were they guarded?"

"What makes the Jews so easy to point the finger at?"

Level II: 2 Points - Questions posed are asking for simple responses without considering causal events, the material presented, or conditions of the time. May be an "either/or" situation. Example: "Why didn't the Jews fight back?"

"What did the Germans have against the Jews? Why were they so cruel? Did the Germans feel it was necessary to kill a person even if they never committed a crime? How could the Germans tell if a person was a Jew or not?"

"How did Americans feel about this? Did any of them realize what was happening to the Jews during the war? Or did they find out when it was too late? Did they believe it? How many Americans still think it was all a farce? Is this when a law was passed against bigotry?"

Level III: 3 Points - Recognizes complexity in situation (not black or white). May extrapolate or inquire or comment on reciprocal relationships and causation. May ask for further definition of the situation.

"Why would a whole country follow the ideas of this man and help him? Something had to be psychologically wrong with him (and all the Nazis for that matter)."

"I think the big question that sticks in my mind is why did the others (non-Jews) not take any great strides to help the Jews? I know there is a kind of "Better you than me" attitude about it but I'm sure there must have been some other people that wanted to help but didn't. What held them back? Was it just because they also feared death from the Germans?"

Level IV: 4 Points - Recognizes complexity in the situation, and inquires about the consequences (may draw into today or future).

"What did the people of Germany feel about the action against the Jews? Did they realize what their country was doing to the Jews? Why didn't someone react quicker to the Holocaust and put it to an end? Why the Jews? Why not Christians or Catholics or even Lutherans? Those who survived the Holocaust ... how has this affected their lives and how do they feel toward those who started the Holocaust?"

"How did individual Germans feel about their part in the final solution? How did exposure to such violence affect the German society, and do Germans still hate Jews today? Do Jews want revenge on the Germans as a nation, or has everyone put World War II in the past (forgive and forget)?"

Level V: 5 Points - Recognizes paradox/difference in point of view. Draws on outside information.

Question #2

Question: Could a tragedy like this one happen again? What are the reasons for your answer?

Level 0: 0 Points - Expression of opinion without supporting reasons and details.

"I think it might be possible because you never can tell what can happen."

"No, I just don't think something like that could ever possibly happen again."

Level I: 1 Point - Responses present an oversimplification resulting in simple dichotomies. Example: "either/or", good guys/bad guys, white knight, devil theory.

"No, I don't believe this will ever happen again. I'm sure if something as inhumane as this started to happen the U.S. will step in and stop it."

"No, I don't think anybody but Hitler could possibly hate a certain group of people as he did."

Level II: 2 Points - One reason given which lacks any further elaboration or explanation. In longer passages, the additional material tends to be restatements of original theme rather than extending the argument with new evidence or perspectives.

"I think people today value human life more. If this did reoccur, I believe it would be stopped once someone knew what was going on."

"Yes, small countries whose leaders are picked without the people's consent would probably have a better chance of this happening."

Level III: 3 Points - Level three identifies more than one reason.

"I think that the memory of the Holocaust will live forever, and people will be on the look-out for rising leaders such as Hitler. Foreign countries would probably intervene much quicker if a situation like this happened again."

"Yes, if a society is having a very bad situation, a great new leader with an idea that seems wonderful comes along, then it seems entirely possible that they would follow him/her and do exactly as they instruct."

Level IV: 4 Points - Level four identifies one or more reasons which are supported and elaborated.

"No, I don't believe a tragedy on this scale could happen again. There are too many checks and balances between countries and their citizens for this to happen again.

No country is faced with the same problems Germany was faced with back then. (At least not to the same extent.) There is no reason for this to happen again.

I also believe that hindsight will help our (and other nation's) foresight. I don't believe that any nation would stand for this happening again."

"I don't think so. Well, then again, possibly. - People are being killed daily by governments and government enforcers, not on such a large scale. I think that economic sanctions and trade embargos could pressure a country in today's world not to do something that silly."

Level V: 5 Points - The highest level involves a network of causations which synthesize information. May involve a more global and integrated assessment. May bring in outside analogy or draw parallels with current events.

"As an eternal optimist, I hope that this could never happen again. However, what has been done in 40 years to change humans from allowing another holocaust from happening? The same reasons of fear, depression, and prejudice have not been taken away from our society. People always want someone to blame. Whether it is the witches in Salem during the 1700's or Communists in Washington during the 1950's - we often take our fears and act viciously because of them. Until we are truly able to accept different people and ideas, there will still be the slight possibility that it could happen again."

"I suppose it would be possible for such a tragedy to reoccur, but it would not do so in a country that had been a democracy for a long time. In a democracy, people are too involved in their government to let a dictator take over. In a country ravaged by hunger, poverty, unemployment and depression, people will look to someone to help them. If that person is a dictator, and the people are used to dictators, he will not have much of a problem getting into power. When coming into or during control of a country, a person needs to find a scapegoat. It could be an abstract emotion, such as fear, or a race, such as the Jews. In a country suffering greatly, the people will look for a way out. The way out may be a leader like Hitler, and another Holocaust might begin."

Question #3

Question: Describe the reactions of the Jewish people.
Give the reasons they reacted this way.

Level 0: 0 Points - No response or any descriptive statement without further description or explanation. Example: "They were afraid."

"They were all willing. I would have resisted more. But I guess that's easy to say since I was never there."

"They would do anything for food. I think they knew that they would die and just accepted it as life."

Level I: 1 Point - Expresses a single point of view, coupled with a single explanation. Example: "They were afraid because the Germans were too strong."

"They seemed not to care. This was because they were not aware of what was happening to them."

"Most of the Jewish people tried to do as they were told, because they did not know what was going on. They did not understand what was happening to them."

Level II: 2 points - Offers single point of view supported with two or more reasons.

"They were afraid because the Germans were too strong and they didn't know where they were going."

"The Jews were very passive in their reacting to the mass killings. Either they didn't know what fate was in store for them, or they were too scared (too weak) to resist the German round-ups and executions. Lack of knowledge, lack of organization among the Jewish people, and fear of the Germans are all reasons the Jewish people reacted the way they did."

Level III: 3 points - Recognizes divergent perspectives or point of view. Example: "Some fought back, others were passive."

"Most of them complied without resistance to the German orders. They reacted this way because they thought that allowing a few to be killed would save the majority." (implied other group)

"They were in a tough place. There was no way out. They could either do what they were told or die. Some of them rebelled and succeeded, and some didn't - they didn't want to die (get killed)."

Level IV: 4 points - Recognizes divergent reactions. Elaborates each position within the divergence.

Level V: 5 points - Constructs an organizing principle or frame of reference to arrive at an explanatory answer. May make comparison to other external events which evokes a generalization about human behavior. Example: "Similar to a person with an incurable disease."

QUESTION #4

Question: What do you think the individual German Soldier might have thought about participating in the killing of the Jews?

Level 0: 0 point - Description without explanation.

"The German soldier probably didn't like the idea of killing innocent people."

"The soldier thought he was saving his country."

Level I: 1 point - Expresses a single point of view coupled with a single explanation.

"They could have felt a lot of guilt because they are innocent victims. Seeing the faces of the people when they found out they were going to die would be something. I would never forget. They might be sick of seeing all the dead bodies."

"I believe that the German soldiers believed that they were simply carrying out orders. I also believe that any German soldier who didn't carry out orders would have been executed like the Jewish people."

Level II: 2 points - Offers single point of view supported with two or more reasons.

"They thought that it might have been wrong but they were told to and they did it because they followed orders. Hitler started all this off when he wanted office because he needed scapegoats to get the Germans behind him."

"I think the individual German soldier didn't like killing the Jews, but he did it for his country. He might have killed the Jews because he thought if he didn't, he might be keeled, too."

Level III: 3 points - Recognizes divergent reactions of soldiers - "some....others." Or recognizes conflicting feelings within a single soldier. One side may be elaborated while other isn't.

"Those who look upon Hitler as a God probably felt no or very little remorse. They were carrying out his word. Hitler's ability to totally swing people to his belief made a fairly large number of the soldiers unaffected by the killing.

"Soldiers who were not fully dedicated to Hitler and his anti-semitism were probably disgusted by the killing but may have been too afraid to stop."

"It could go both ways. They could either not mind killing people or they would do it because they were ordered to and would possibly be killed if they didn't."

Level IV: 4 Points - Recognize divergent reaction and elaborates each position within the divergent. Recognize unstated possibilities. Goes beyond information.

"That he was doing his duty so he was able to justify his actions. Others loved the killing. And a few probably died because they would not help (the Germans)."

Level V: 5 Points - Constructs an organizing principle or frame of reference to arrive at an explanatory answer. May make comparison to other external events which evokes a generalization about human behavior.

"It depends on the person, but if a group of people is told that they are a superior race, they will react the same way that the Germans did. A teacher did an experiment like this and his students became violent against other students not in the class. I believe that the average soldier thought he was doing the right thing."

Question #5

Question: During World War II, in the United States, there were a large number of citizens with Japanese ancestry. Many of the farmers and neighbors were envious of Japanese prosperity. The United States (which was at war with Japan) put all their Japanese citizens into concentration camps. When this decision was challenged, the Supreme Court declared that it was legal. What comments or observations would you like to make about this situation?

Level 0: 0 Points - No response or any descriptive statement without further description or explanation.

"That was war. War is ugly."

"During the time of war, I think it would be necessary."

Level I: 1 Point - Offer single position without elaboration or reason.

"I think it was unconstitutional to treat American citizens in this manner, regardless of their home country. I can't believe that our Supreme Court would make such an ignorant decision."

"I don't see how this could actually be a legal thing by putting the Japanese into concentration camps without a really good reason."

Level II: 2 Points - Offers single position with two or more reasons.

"It was not right for our country to treat the

Japanese in this manner. While it is true that a small few of them could have been spies or could have hurt the war effort, it was far more important that we should follow the idea that all men are created equal and that we don't have the right to force another human to do something against his or her will."

"I think it was the correct thing to do because we had no idea of who could be a contact with the Japanese. It was simply a security measure to insure complete secrecy. Plus the Japanese, from what I know, were supplied with everything they needed."

Level III: 3 Points - Offers dual positions with one or more explanations or reasons for each position.

"Though in theory the Japanese should have been given trial by jury to determine if an individual was working for Japan, I do not feel that the U.S. was as barbaric and unfair to the Japanese as the Germans were to the Jews. The Japanese had attacked the U.S. first and the Jews had not shown any aggression toward the Germans. Also, the U.S. did not murder the Japanese, we just controlled the Japanese to insure security."

"I feel that the Supreme Court should not have rendered this decision because we felt it was morally wrong for the Germans to put Jews in concentration camps, so why isn't it considered just as wrong for the United States? Besides, what did those Japanese living in America do to the U.S.? If they were a threat to us, we should have handled it in a different way. Why punish all for the action of one person? And in some cases their actions were in the right."

Level IV: 4 Points - Recognizes 2 points of view
(dissonance) each of which is well supported.

Level V: 5 Points - Goes beyond information given. Spell
out parallels. Integrates and constructs
organizing principle.
Holistic/global/encompassing.